In Memoriam.

MISS ARMEDA GIBBS.

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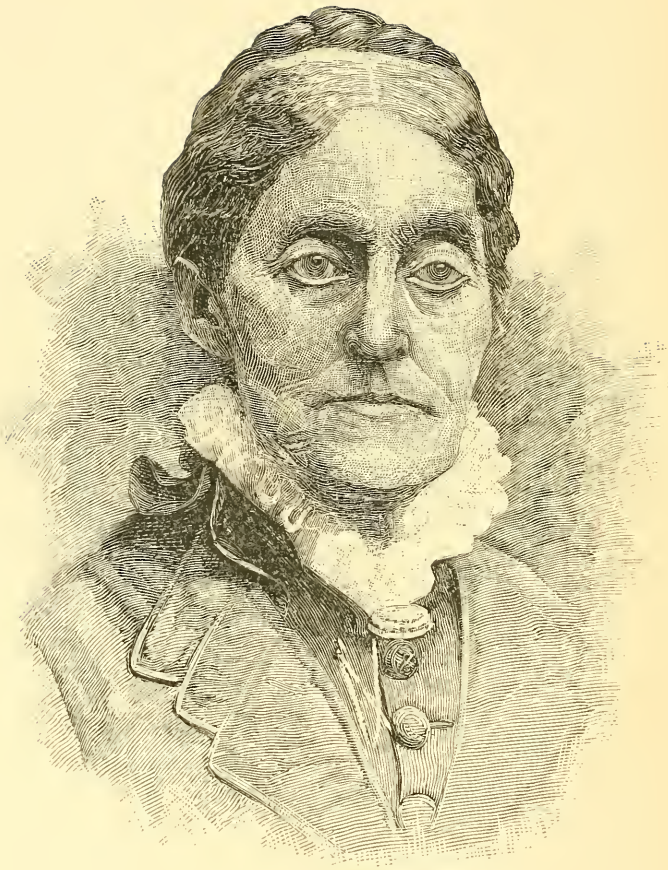

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

ON

MISS ARMEDA GIBBS.

BY REV. J. E. TWITCHELL, D. D.

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Miss Armeda Gibbs died in East Boston, Aug. 27, 1884. The funeral services were held in the Maverick Church, August 30th, her pastor, Rev. J. E. Twitchell, officiating. The altar and rear of the pulpit were filled with beautiful floral tributes — offerings of the church and personal friends. Among the most conspicuous were "Gates Ajar," a hillside of green holly with a cross at the base and a crown above,— a design of the "Old Mission Chapel" at the Fourth Section,— and a large crescent, fifteen feet in extent, bearing her last words, "Victory! victory! All is well!" During the services, "Rock of Ages" and several of her favorite hymns were sung; also, at her particular request, the doxology, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." The remains were taken to Woodlawn Cemetery, where, after a brief burial-service, they were solemnly consigned to their last resting-place in the lot of her choice.

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In Memoriam.

We are gathered here, beloved, at this burial service, not as mourners, only as we all feel in our souls a deep sense of loss at the departure from our midst of one of God's most devout and useful servants, but rather to rejoice that she who was so singularly pure, and so exceptionally serviceable, has reached her rest and reward, gaining such a glorious victory and leaving such blessed memories behind.

Much might be said of the grandeur of a complete consecration to God, as illustrated in the one whose departure has called us together. All I shall attempt, however, will be to sketch some of the most salient features of that life, so large a part of which has been lived among us, and in whose inspiring fellowship so many of us have had so large a share.

It is not my purpose to indulge in eulogy. This would not be in keeping with the wishes of the dead. She was always remarkably reticent regarding her spiritual attainments and her life-work; always, too, had great aversion to speaking of herself, or having others speak in her praise. Of rare humility, she

would have no mention made of what she had become or had accomplished, other than for the honor of Christ, to whom she ever felt indebted for what she was and what she was able to do for the welfare of the world.

There would be no propriety in attempting in detail any analysis of her life or life-work. We may, however, mention historical facts for the glory of Him who wrought *in* her such beauty of character, and wrought *by* her in such blessed ministry for the good of men. We best learn of privilege and duty by vision of those whose lives illustrate the peace and power of godliness. In this way, too, comes our highest inspiration to *do* and to *endure* in the name and for the sake of Christ.

It is in the hope of thus magnifying the grace of God, and finding incentives to a completer consecration, that we pause here a few moments in review of the life of this self-sacrificing and heroic woman.

Miss Armeda Gibbs was born in Sturbridge, Mass., June 28, 1807; thus, at her death, was seventy-seven years of age. Her early home was of the old Puritan type — somewhat solemn, but sweet in all its influences and surroundings. Her parents were of sterling integrity and practical piety.

In her earlier years Miss Gibbs had no special advantages of education or culture of any kind—nothing more than was afforded by the common country school of two generations ago. All her surroundings were of the plainer sort.

As a *child*, however, she gave evidence of controlling Christian principle, and of close companionship with Christ.

How young she began to feel her need of the Saviour, and to *trust* him, we are not informed. Likely she herself could not have told us. From all that can be learned of her childhood, it seems that she never knew the time when she did not love the Lord Jesus, and *rest* in him as her personal Saviour and keeper.

At the age of six or seven years she had the fixed habit of secret prayer; she had, also, implicit faith in God, and an eager desire to be useful in the world. The following incident of those early years shows the bent of her mind and the deep devotion of her heart: In the orchard, or field, near the old family residence, there was a certain shaded rock, where she could be secluded, and commune with God. That became her *Bethel.* Leaving dolls and playthings, and often *playmates*, who came to pass an hour or the afternoon with her, she would retire to that sheltered spot, and pray alone. Once or twice along these later years, in confidential intercourse with special friends, she reverted to those early devotions and experiences, her face lighting up with joy as she spoke of them.

Thus, at an age when most children pray *simply the prayers that are taught them,* the child Armeda *talked with God* out of her heart, telling him how she felt, what she would have him be to her, and what

enable her to do. The burden of those childhood prayers was, that she might be pure in character and useful — that she might be fitted for some *special* service, and *led into it.*

The most of Miss Gibbs's youth was spent in the ordinary work and study of common country girls. That she was loved in the home, and by all who knew her, it need not be said. No one, however, seems to have looked upon her as destined to become a Christian worker of peculiar prominence, or to have discovered in her traits of character peculiarly prophetic.

For a season she lived in Boston, in the family of an older married sister, all the while maturing and beautifying in the graces of the Spirit, and all the while looking anxiously for any opening where she could serve the Master. Her soul, indeed, seems to have been restive and eager for some opening where she could be actively engaged in the service of Christ.

Quite early in life — how early I have not been able to ascertain — she made a public profession of her faith in the Lord Jesus; in 1840, by letter, joined the old Salem Street Church; and later, the Maverick Church, of East Boston, to which she was most tenderly attached up to the time of her death, and for which she made large sacrifices of time, and strength, and treasure. Never, I think, have I known one in whose heart the Church held a more exalted place, or who more highly prized its ordinances. No spot was so sacred or so sweet to her as the sanctuary; no fellowship so precious as that of the people of God.

However worn or weary, whatever feebleness was upon her, she longed for the Lord's house, and would often say, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand."

Those of you who have been acquainted with Miss Gibbs in these last years of her toil and weakness, will remember what exertions she made to be with us in our Sabbath services and in our meetings for conference and prayer. Down to the very last she would send some sweet promise from the Word of God for our encouragement; and when too weak to sit through the sacramental service, would be brought in in season to partake of the emblems with us. How glad we were to see her, and to receive her messages — gems from God's great storehouse of truth. And here it may be said that the Bible was *food for her soul* — never doubted, never *questioned*, always read and repeated with wonderful assurance. She seems to have taken every promise as designed for *her*, as truly as if she were the *only one* in all the world for whom the Word was written. Never shall I forget the call I made upon her one afternoon. After a few moments' conversation regarding the work of the Lord among us, she said, "I want to show you my precious present." She led the way into another room, and took from the table the New Testament in several volumes of large print. "*This is it*," she said; and she opened the books and read slowly, but with wonderful emphasis and unction, promise after promise on which her soul had fed.

The hour we spent together that afternoon opened up to me her inner life as a child of God, and gave me to see the source of her power as a believer and a worker.

About the year 1840 Miss Gibbs became a volunteer tract-distributer in the district known as "North End," which was then crowded with the irreligious and the vicious. For this work she showed remarkable adaptation, making friends of the rich and poor, the young and old, Christian and unchristian, alike. Desiring to be useful on the Sabbath, as well as through the week, she became a teacher in the House of Correction, at South Boston; also a teacher in a colored Sabbath-school in Robinson's Alley. It was there that she first became interested in the slaves, so many of whom at that time were escaping from the South. Many of you remember the perilous flight of those fugitives up into Canada, and the assistance they received along their routes from slave-hating, liberty-loving, God-fearing men and women. You recollect how, to be known as having aided in the escape of these poor fugitives, exposed to arrest and imprisonment, and how to have association with them in the way of sympathy, or help of any kind, was the occasion of ridicule and scorn on the part of many.

It was at this time that Miss Gibbs began, in a peculiar manner, to illustrate her faith and heroism. I can give you no better view of her devotion and her unfaltering purpose to "*spend and be spent*" for

the Master, than by quoting from her diary, which reads as follows: —

BOSTON, Aug. 22, 1846.

As I have been permitted, in the providence of my kind, heavenly Father, to enter a new field of labor, so I would desire to consecrate myself anew to his service. O help me, blessed Saviour, to do all with an eye single to thy glory! Blessed Spirit come, by thy sanctifying and purifying power, and cleanse this heart of mine, and make it a meet temple for thine own indwelling, that I may thus be prepared to be used as an instrument in thy hand of accomplishing much good! O that I might possess that active, living faith which will ask and receive those rich blessings which I know it is thy delight to impart! But I would earnestly plead that thou wouldst not permit me to go there to labor unless thou wilt go with me, and add thy blessing.

Sept. 7, 1846.—This afternoon had seven in my class. Oh, it is delightful thus to sit and study the Word of God with these sable sons and daughters of the Lord! It is God, and God alone, who makes us differ in color; and shall we feel above them? God forbid! O God, help me to be faithful, and do give me thy holy, blessed Spirit, that I may be enabled to impart instruction to others, that thy name may be glorified and precious souls saved!

Jan. 25, 1847.—Visited six families to-day. The school addressed by Mr. Bibb, a fugitive slave. Had an interesting meeting in the evening, but did not feel satisfied with myself. Lord, have I a duty to perform there? Show me, and O, may I not disobey!

March 13th.— Praise, praise, praise the Lord! I do feel that he is with us. Two of my dear class have set their faces Zionward. O Lord, keep them! Let the Angel

of the Covenant write their names in the Lamb's Book of Life, and seal them heirs of glory! O let them not be drawn aside by Satan, or drawn away by the world! Lord, it is thy work, and thou shalt have the glory. Again I would say, praise the Lord! I would make a new consecration of myself to the service of the Lord. O how unworthy I am to be employed in his service! — and yet he deigns to employ me. He gives me strength, time, and inclination.

June 7th.— I have felt much of the Divine presence during this period. I have had the privilege of conversing with many precious souls, and urging them to look to the Saviour as their only hope. One of my class has united with the church by profession. Another hopes he has been reclaimed, and has united by letter.

These passages are a vivid picture of the work of the Divine Spirit in her soul, and prove a process of purification going on by which she was fitted for the larger sphere of usefulness so soon to open to her.

Canada did not prove the paradise which those refugees expected. They rejoiced in their freedom as they only *can* who have known bondage. But they knew not how to use their liberty. They were in need of friends and helpers almost as much as in their midnight marches to the North. Their ignorance and degradation deeply touched the heart of Miss Gibbs. She saw her opportunity to serve where others shrank from serving, and she eagerly embraced it. She knew no one in Canada, was not indifferent to the peril of the undertaking, but from it

did not for a moment shrink. Sustained by full confidence in the presence of Christ, and full faith that he would protect and bless her in the work, she started *alone* to find these poor fugitives, and serve them in any way she could.

That she was enthusiastically in love with her work among the poor of the "North End," and that it cost her much to leave them for this mission up in Canada, is fully shown by the following extracts from her diary: —

Aug. 14, 1847.— I cannot find language to express myself at this time. The powers of darkness are mustering all their forces against my soul; but, praise the Lord, there is a strong refuge, into which the righteous may enter and be safe. Oh, can I hope to be one of that happy number! Yes; I trust I am a sinner saved by grace. Jesus, my trust and confidence is in thee, and thee alone. Though an host encamp against me, yet the Angel of the Lord will deliver me. Yes, I will trust in the Lord. My class was peculiarly interesting. Oh, how can I leave them! Lord, strengthen me for the trial. Thy grace is sufficient.

Oct. 13, 1847.— On board the steamer. Have just embarked for Canada. The wind has blown a hurricane all day. The Angel of the Covenant go with us and protect us! And oh, may I be prepared to enter into the service of my blessed Master! May I receive fresh unction from on high! I would even now say, Lord, let me not go unless thou dost go with me.

Amherstburg, Oct. 17th.— What do I not owe to my kind Father! He has protected and preserved me amidst all

the dangers of my journey, and has brought me in safety to this distant land. To-day I have been permitted to commence my labor among them. I trust the Lord has prepared their hearts to receive me, as they seem to welcome me with open arms. To-day, Sister Rice and myself were enabled to organize a Sabbath-school. Thirty were present, and I cannot but hope that our labors have received the approbation of Heaven. Unworthy as I am, I have felt the presence of the blessed Spirit to aid and assist me in my feeble efforts to benefit souls. Precious Saviour, oh be with me, for I can do nothing without thee; but by thy strength assisting me I can do all things!

April 8, 1850.— May the trials through which we are passing lead me nearer to the precious Saviour. O Lord, bring light out of darkness and order out of confusion!

April 28, 1850.— O my Father, wilt thou help me once more to enter into covenant with thee, and to rely upon thy precious word that thou wilt cause "all things to work together for good to them that love thee"! Teach me, my kind Father, what to do, whether to stay here or to return to my native land. I do want to do *thy will.* O Lord, let thy Spirit teach me, and direct me what to do. Thou knowest the trying position in which I am placed!

We have no knowledge of the peculiar difficulties and trials to which there is reference above, but that they were painful and severe is evident. Her faith, however, did not falter, nor did she turn aside from this self-sacrificing work until the Lord plainly directed.

It was at this time that her *pre-eminently* close

walk with God seems to have begun, though already, in every feature of Christian character, she had become conspicuous.

In those poor, degraded men and women she saw the image of her Master, and longed to lead them into the liberty of his adopted children.

It is said that on the night of her arrival in Canada she walked the streets for hours unattended, engaged in prayer that she might be guided to the right place where to begin her work, and find the right persons to sympathize with her and aid her.

Her prayers that night were remarkably answered in the person of a poor colored man whom she met, and who proved to be one of the fugitives, and who conducted her to the very place appointed of the Lord for the beginning of her work.

These poor refugees were found in the most ignorant and pitiable condition; many of them clad in rags, and without food or shelter. They seemed utterly dazed with their surroundings, not knowing what to do, or which way to turn for help. Many of them were rushing into all sorts of wild excesses. With these she labored three long years — teaching them to read; telling them of Christ, the great Emancipator of the world; unfolding to them the truth of God's precious Word; sharing their poverty with them, and serving them in all the manifold ways which consecrated woman is sure to find. The record of the last "great day" only will reveal her success in this field, as these dusky sons and daughters come up to

call her blessed, and share with her the triumphs of those who conquer.

On the return of Miss Gibbs from these labors among the refugees, she began *her chief life-work* here in East Boston, as missionary of our City Missionary Society, July 1, 1850. A mission enterprise was about to be started in the Fourth Section. It was regarded as a difficult and exceedingly important undertaking, demanding great wisdom and rare devotion. Miss Gibbs was immediately chosen for this field; entered on her work with an enthusiasm which amazed even those who knew her best; and for a full generation has been among us one of God's most devoted, zealous, self-sacrificing and efficient servants. At once her work was organized — the Sabbath-school, the prayer-meeting, the children's meeting; and, ere long, the church, to which some of you present here this afternoon look back as to a sunlit summit in in your lives.

Miss Gibbs went among the poorest in their poverty, among the sickest in their suffering, and among the saddest in their sorrow — a ministering angel to all. She was up early and late, heeding every call — indeed, not waiting for the call if she had knowledge of want of any kind. The wonder was that she could do and endure so much. Few, if any, in this city, or in this Commonwealth, have watched by so many sick, have prayed with so many dying, or have helped with their own hands to prepare so many for burial. Often in the dead of night Miss Gibbs might have

been seen, *unattended,* responding to every call of sorrow or distress. She often carried great baskets and bundles of food and clothing to the hungry and cold. Every one saw her to be so true a friend that she would relieve them, if in her power, whatever sorrow they felt or want oppressed them, at any hour of the day or night. Everywhere she was welcome in her visits; and, going, she always left a benediction. She was loved, not chiefly because of her charities, but because of her cheer, and sympathy, and prayer, and speech of Christ.

A prosperous mission church soon grew up in the Fourth Section, with a large and flourishing Sunday-school. Ere long Union Chapel was built, chiefly, if not wholly, through her efforts. It was in the midst of this work that Miss Gibbs's heart became especially concerned for the children and youth, so many of whom she found neglected and growing up in habits of vice. "Oh for the boys and girls!" she used to say. "Would that the mothers could become enlisted!"

There was at this time in successful operation in the Maverick Church a "Maternal Association." Weekly meetings were held by mothers to pray for their children, and to counsel together for their conversion.

Associations of this kind already existed in several churches of the city, and somewhat generally through New England. In her *home* church Miss Gibbs saw an open door where she could enter and make appeal.

Thus into these meetings she put her whole soul, stirring the members with her prayers and exhortations to an unwonted zeal and faith. The result of all this was, that "Mothers' Meetings" were started outside the church among the poor, Miss Gibbs being *pioneer* in work of this kind.

Soon the war came on. Many of the boys represented in these "Maternal Associations" enlisted; when all these mothers, and Miss Gibbs, though not a mother, grew more anxious, and prayed more earnestly for the conversion of the unconverted, and for the steadfastness of such as had learned to love the Saviour.

These "Maternal Meetings," at that time especially, are said to have been of wonderful fervency and spiritual power; and Miss Gibbs is said to have prayed and labored with great faith and with unfaltering zeal.

Then the boys were wounded; were sick in hospitals; were in peculiar need of sympathy and help. It began to dawn on some that women could do for these sick and wounded soldiers what men could not do. Thus the suggestion of women-nurses. Crowds of the wounded, the sick, and dying were at Annapolis, Md. There was great suffering among them from lack of proper care, and great demand for immediate action in their behalf. Women were needed then, and the plan was *at once* to send them. There was much opposition to this movement among the surgeons and army officers at Annapolis, but finally consent was gained that the experiment should be tried. Miss

Gibbs was suggested as the one to go. She was ready, if she could be released from her engagement to the City Missionary Society. That society was in full sympathy with the plan of sending women-nurses and with Miss Gibbs's desire to enter this new field, though they felt that they were making a large sacrifice, as her labors in Boston at that time were greatly needed, and were proving eminently successful. Arrangements were soon perfected, and Miss Gibbs became the first woman-nurse in that field.

Reaching Annapolis, Md., she at once disarmed all prejudice and won all hearts, so that word came back, "If you have any more women like Miss Gibbs, send them down to us." Thus other missionaries of our City Missionary Society devoted themselves to the same benevolent and patriotic work — none, however, *excelling*, if any *equalling*, the efficiency of Miss Gibbs. If I could paint here a picture of this godly woman, moving among the cots of our sick and dying soldiers with cheer, and prayer, and re-assuring faith, you would see as bright an example of the pattern set by our blessed Lord as is ever shown.

Remember that she became a nurse under the fresh baptism of the "Maternal Association" meetings; that she knew the spirit of the mothers at home; that she had a supreme faith in the power of prayer; that she was wonderfully wise in her work, taking advantage of all surroundings and all memories. Thus she often referred to these meetings, of which the boys had heard at home, and which many of them had at-

tended. In their partial delirium they would sometimes ask, "What day is this?" Being told that it was Wednesday, they would ask, "What time is it?" Being told the hour of the afternoon, they would clasp their hands and say, "Oh! mother is praying for us now." And many were hopefully converted during these afternoon hours, as she talked and prayed with them.

One special feature of Miss Gibbs's usefulness, while a nurse in the army, is to be found in the letters which she wrote home. These are said to have been *wonderful*, reading as if they were really inspired of God, enabling those who heard them read almost to *see* down the long wards in hospitals and among the tents, and almost to *hear* the voices of dying men. Any vestry in this city or vicinity could be crowded at any hour of the day if it were known that one of Miss Gibbs's letters was to be read. The wonder was that she could write such letters, wielding such a graphic pen and making such eloquent appeals. It is entirely consistent with the whole teaching of Scripture to consider her raised up and endowed of God for a mission singularly exceptional, and to believe her quickened in all her powers by the indwelling Spirit.

An incident toward the close of her work as nurse is worthy of special mention here. She was seriously sick, so that her life was despaired of by surgeons and friends. Word came on Saturday afternoon that she was dying, and asking what disposition should be made

of her body. Word went back at once, "Care for it tenderly; embalm it; put it in a metallic coffin, and forward it to East Boston." It was expected that at any moment word would come of her death. Certain Christian people in the community began to feel that this sickness need not be unto death. A special passage of Scripture came to mind: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." It was said, "Let us try the power of prayer." The Sabbath came. Word was sent to all the churches of East Boston and to others in the city and vicinity. The mission church in the Fourth Section spent the whole day in fasting and prayer. Never, I presume, in all the history of Boston, was there a day of prayer like that, for an *individual.* Toward evening, certain ones who were praying together suddenly felt in their souls no desire to pray longer. All unction had gone; and they said, one to another, "What does this mean? Either our prayers have been answered or Miss Gibbs is dead." Anxiously word was awaited; and soon it came, stating that at five o'clock "Sabbath afternoon, suddenly and unexpectedly to all, Miss Gibbs began to rally." They could not account for it: the disease had not run its course; no new remedies were tried; physicians and watchers were baffled — Miss Gibbs seemed to be dying, seemed almost dead, *but lived!* How

often help comes from on high of which the world knows nothing! Doubtless surgeons, and officers, and watchers never dreamed of the cause of that almost miraculous recovery. Praying souls, however, here in Boston, are at no loss to account for it.

I mention this case as an illustration of the remarkable affection in which this good woman was held, by Catholics as well as Protestants, by Christians of all denominations, and by the unchristian; and also as an illustration of the power of *prevailing prayer* — for such I believe it to be.

Miss Gibbs was spared — came home weary and worn, but fully ripe, and resumed her mission-work among us. Since then, for twenty years, she has been instant, in season and out of season, in her ministry to the needy and sad of this community. For the last two years she has been mostly laid aside from active work, and, at times, a great sufferer. But her witness has been *wonderful* to the love and grace of God. Such prayers as she offered I never heard; such faith as she exhibited I have seldom seen. Heaven seemed to come down to earth and dwell in her room. As long as she was able to be carried to the church she would come to our communion services. Always at our prayer-meetings a message would be brought from her. She would often call over names in her prayers, and never prayed without asking, "O Lord, bless the dear Maverick Church!" She was a tower of strength among us, and will be missed in every home.

For the last few months she has seemed every day to be at death's door, and longed to go home — willing, however, to wait God's time. Her last words were, "Victory! victory! All is well!"

That *all is well* no one has questioned. Those who knew this godly woman, without exception, rise up to call her blessed.

Committing all her way unto the Lord from her very childhood, she was led, step by step, and followed with an implicit faith. Looking back, *we* can see how she was prepared for each enlarging sphere of usefulness, and how much, with only *ordinary* opportunities of education, a consecrated soul can accomplish. We wonder not that at the last her shout was one of victory!

Thus ended a life in which there was rare blending and illustration of humility of heart, implicit faith in God, clear apprehension of truth, abounding charity, supreme love for the church, and self-sacrificing devotion to the good of others.

Her memory will live long among us; her influence be long felt upon us; her prayers be answered for us as the years go by.

We cannot mourn for her to-day. We think of her as free from all the ills of earth, as finding the fruition of her soul, and hearing the "Well done" of Christ.

On whom shall her mantle fall?